

## **ELIZABETH NESTA MARKS – HER OTHER LIFE AS SOCIETY ACTIVIST, CONSERVATIONIST, HISTORIAN AND BIOGRAPHER**

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### **Abstract**

Details are provided on the role of Elizabeth Nesta Marks as Society leader and activist, as conservationist, and as historian/biographer.

### **Introduction**

The distinguished Australian entomologist, Elizabeth Nesta ('Pat') Marks (1918-2002) is best known for her long career as a mosquito taxonomist and resident Australian expert on all things mosquito (Marks and Cummins 2004, Anon. 1986). She was a woman of imposing presence and strong personality, with a sense of obligation to her science and to the community in a broader context. She became involved in many issues and it is fair to say that some of these consumed her time at the expense of her mosquito work, often to her own frustration. But Australian science benefited greatly from those competing interests. The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of these 'extra-curricular' passions of Pat Marks.

### **Society leader and activist**

Today, as most scientific societies struggle to compete with television, the internet and commercialized sport to get members along to meetings, it is difficult to conceive how important these groups were in the 1950s-1960s when Pat Marks was at the height of her scientific activity. She was then based in the Entomology Department at the University of Queensland, a period she later said was her most contented and productive. Fig. 1 shows the staff and postgraduates of the Department in 1964. Almost everyone in that photograph would have turned up to the regular 'second Monday of the month' meetings of the Entomological Society of Queensland, where they would have mixed with perhaps 30 or 40 other entomologists, from every institution in Brisbane which harboured a glint of six-legged science within its walls. On the 'third Monday of the month' there was the meeting of the Queensland Naturalists' Club, where field-inclined professional biologists mingled with a great slew of keen amateur biologists, often 60-80 attending. The 'first Monday of the month' was the Royal Society of Queensland's night, when an eclectic mix of Brisbane scientists, ranging from geologists and botanists to mathematicians and biochemists, filled a lecture hall to hear a guest speaker, often a visiting international scientist. The Royal Historical Society of Queensland also had its night. A feature of almost every one of these Brisbane meetings for almost 50 years was the presence of Pat Marks, usually sitting front row centre, and a participant in everything that went on.



**Figs 1-2.** (1) Staff and postgraduates of the Entomology Department, University of Queensland in 1964. L to R, back row: Geoff Monteith, Rajinder Kumar, Ian Yeo, Tom Woodward; main row: Christine Buckley, Ann May, Sybil Curtis, Elizabeth Bernays, Angus Macqueen, Margaret Colledge, Lesley Powell, Pat Marks, Athol Perkins; kneeling: Elizabeth Exley, Patricia Webb. (2) Three distinguished Honorary Members of the Australian Entomological Society (L to R): John Evans, Pat Marks and Ian Mackerras, photographed at Tom Woodward's home in 1978.

Pat had been inculcated into the milieu of scientific societies through her father, E.O. Marks, medical doctor, geologist, inventor and leading Brisbane intellectual. She inherited a strong feeling about the importance of these groups to scientific life and later wrote: 'no Society has the right to the designation 'scientific' if it exists only to serve its members - its prime duty is to the discipline it represents and the community it serves (Marks and Mackerras 1971). In other words, she thought these groups should not just run 'feel-good' meetings and outings, they should also do the 'hard yards' to promote their science and tackle the issues of the day. This she herself did with a vengeance throughout her career, serving on councils of numerous societies (Table 1), becoming President of four and gaining the ultimate accolade, Honorary Life Membership, of five of them.

She was resolutely committed to truth, fairness, transparency and scientific integrity in all her society activities and did much good. Being an active member of many societies she was the conduit for much 'cross-pollination' of ideas and activities between societies. Those of us with long memories know she was also a vehement stickler for procedural correctness, and woe betide the new secretary who didn't record the motion seconder correctly, or the treasurer who couldn't explain the minutiae of his accounts. Her reputation and experience led to her playing a central role in some society-based issues, such as:

#### *Formation of the Australian Entomological Society*

One of the major issues which Pat became involved in was the formation, in 1965, of the Australian Entomological Society, our first and only national entomological group. One would think that this would have been a welcomed move, but in fact it was almost prevented by bitter jealousies between State-based groups - nothing new there - but it was largely Pat's steely resolve to find middle ground between the factions that saved the day. When the Entomological Society of Queensland was formed in 1923, one of its stated constitutional aims was the formation of a national entomological society. In 1953, it canvassed entomologists and found support and, in 1962, started the *Journal of the Entomological Society of Queensland*, with the express object of transferring it to a new Society to be named the Entomological Society of Australia. To the astonishment of Queenslanders, a group in Sydney called the 'Society of Entomologists' promptly changed its name to the 'Entomological Society of Australia (NSW)' and started a journal called the *Journal of the Entomological Society of Australia (NSW)*, thus preoccupying the name intended for the planned new society and its journal. This created enormous consternation, because years of efforts by ESQ, CSIRO Entomology and many individuals had gone towards paving the way for the new society. Eventually, it was Pat Marks who journeyed south to meet with the recalcitrant group and, by sheer force of logical argument, stared them down and gained their agreement to allow the new society and its journal to

proceed as planned. Pat Marks was first Chairman of the Executive, later President and Honorary Member, of the new national society named, by force of circumstance, the Australian Entomological Society. Its formation received the overwhelming support of Australian entomologists and was a great source of pride to Pat Marks for the rest of her life. Characteristically, Pat eventually documented the controversy of its formation in detail for the historic record (Marks and Mackerras 1971).

**Table 1.** List of societies of which Pat Marks was a member, showing offices in which she served.

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**Society, period of membership and offices held (in chronological sequence)**

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Queensland Naturalists' Club: Member 1937–2002. Offices held: Treasurer, Councillor, Editor, Excursion Secretary, Vice President, President. Honorary Life Member 1976.

Royal Society of Queensland: Member 1939–2002. Offices held: Councillor, Treasurer, Vice President, President. Life Member.

Entomological Society of Queensland: Member 1944–2002. Offices held: Councillor, Secretary, Vice President, President. Honorary Life Member 1987.

National Parks Association of Queensland: Member 1945–2002.

Linnean Society of New South Wales: Member 1948–2002.

Royal Entomological Society of London: Fellow 1951–2002.

Royal Historical Society of Queensland: Member 1955–2002.

Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science: Member 1960–2002.

Samford Bora Grounds Preservation Committee: Member 1963–1967.

Australian Entomological Society: Member 1965–2002. Offices held: Councillor, Editorial Board, Convener of Conservation Committee, Vice President, President. Honorary Member 1972.

National Trust of Queensland: Member 1966–2002.

Australian Conservation Foundation: Foundation Member 1966–2002. Offices held: Councillor, Member of Executive Committee, Chairman of Northeast Regional Committee.

Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales: Member 1968–2002.

Pine Rivers Historical Society of Queensland: Member 1971–2002.

Museum Society of Queensland: Member 1971–2002.

Mosquito Control Association of Australia: Member 1990–2002. Life Member 2000.

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### *The 'Regulation 13A' Controversy*

In the science of insect taxonomy, specimens are our currency. Many thousands of specimens move through the international mail as taxonomists borrow and lend them for study. Of those specimens, holotypes are of supreme importance. Most taxonomists would agree that it is desirable that holotypes be lodged, where appropriate museums are available, near to their geographic origin, but this is not essential and many factors may influence a particular situation. In July 1973, a new Regulation 13A was added to the Australian Federal Customs Act 1901-1971, which sought to make it mandatory for new Australian insect holotypes to be lodged in Australian institutions. This appeared without consultation with the entomological community and brought in a situation where it became very difficult for workers outside the major museums to continue to exchange specimens. It also severely limited the ability of overseas museums to acquire Australian insects unless they lodged a permanently binding 'holotype declaration' with the Australian government, which many were not prepared to do. As these implications of the new Regulation sunk in, a giant protest swept scientific circles in Australia and overseas. However, its proponents, who were in positions of considerable power, refused to budge. Pat Marks, with her clear mind and her commitment to international cooperation, quickly emerged as a fearless leader of the opposition. Soon after, she began her term as President of the Australian Entomological Society and, in that capacity, she was able to survey entomologists to demonstrate the overwhelming opposition. She personally confronted politicians and senior bureaucrats in their dens. She got numerous other organisations onside, including the Australian Academy of Science. The matter dragged on for almost a decade and she bitterly resented the inroads it made into her mosquito work, but she worked because there was a high principle involved. Frustratingly, there was never a clear victory, but the Regulation eventually simply disappeared from the statute books because of its inherent unworkability. In true Marksian manner she recorded the whole matter, blow by blow, for posterity (Marks 1978).

### **Pat Marks as Conservationist**

Nature conservation, as a popular concept, really only swam into widespread consciousness in the 1960s. A landmark was the formation of the Australian Conservation Foundation in 1966, an event which gained impetus from the publication of Jock Marshall's seminal book *The Great Extermination* (Marshall 1966) in the same year, shortly before the author's premature death. Pat Marks was a foundation member, an inaugural councillor and, within a year, chairman of the ACF Northeast Regional Committee.

Jacaranda Press, a prominent nature publisher in Brisbane, proposed a book by Australia's leading conservationists to be dedicated to Jock Marshall's memory and with royalties going to ACF. A stable of stellar authors was arranged, including Judith Wright, Len Webb, Vincent Serventy, Jeff

Moseley, Max Day, Dick Piesse and other luminaries of the day. Pat felt the invertebrates should be covered, an unheard of idea at that time, but was reluctant to do the job herself because her specialty was mosquitoes, a group not likely to enthuse the public about invertebrate protection. In the end the task fell to her and she produced a masterly chapter by collating information from her vast network of contacts. It stands as the first attempt to argue a general case for invertebrate conservation in Australia, even though, as she wrote: 'invertebrate zoologists ... need to be stirred out of their defeatist attitude [or] no one will be interested' (Marks 1969). The book itself was one of the first large format, 'coffee table'-type books on Australian nature, complete with foreword by HRH Prince Philip, and is a milestone in our conservation annals.

Later she was Inaugural Convenor of the Australian Entomological Society's Conservation Committee and undertook the extremely onerous task of preparing a submission to the 1972 Senate Committee on National Parks and Wildlife.

On the local scene, Pat worked hard for the preservation of an aboriginal bora ground near the family property at Samford, establishing a Committee, through the Queensland Naturalists' Club, which eventually achieved permanent protection for the site (Marks 1968). With typical thoroughness, as part of that process Pat researched and compiled a review of 58 known aboriginal ceremonial grounds in southeast Queensland.

### **Pat Marks as Historian/Biographer**

Pat Marks was an avid historian, a habit ingrained within her family where an intense pride and interest in their family heritage was shared by all. Like all historians, she had a reluctance to throw things away and the shelves of her famously untidy room sagged under bulging, brown leatherboard boxes of papers, labelled with scribbled subjects on their ends. Amazingly, she could usually put her hands on the particular item of the moment.

She felt she had a duty to record her historical researches for posterity. Determined to get to the truth of matters, she was always careful to record both sides of contentious issues. There are two main themes to her historical writings. Firstly, recording the events and personalities surrounding the formation of scientific societies in Australia and, secondly, biographies (often as obituaries) of individuals, mostly scientists. The best source of references to these is Pat's entry in the recent comprehensive bibliography of Australian entomology by Daniels (2004), while many non-entomological items can be found in the anonymous (but almost certainly self-written) biography that accompanies Pat's Belkin Medal nomination (Anon. 1986).

In writing biographies, Pat always said she tried to get inside her subject, to be able to see the world through their eyes. Reading her accounts, one often comes away with the feeling that you knew how the person looked and

spoke. The entomologists she documented were often passionate people and she always tried to find what had initially set them on their path. Her master work, and swan song, is the 22 page 'Biographical history' chapter in the 1991 edition of *Insects of Australia* (Marks 1991), in which she weaves scores of characters into the two hundred year history of Australian entomology, with each individual clearly defined. Characteristically, one of the major players, herself, rates hardly a mention.

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Elizabeth ('Pat') Marks sitting in an ancient theatre during the International Congress of Entomology in Greece.